

HOT PLATE COOLING SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

5 This application claims the priority benefit of Taiwan application serial no. 89116611, filed August 17, 2000.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 Field of Invention

 The present invention relates to a hot plate cooling system. More particularly, the present invention relates to the cooling system inside a hot plate to be used mainly in rapid thermal processing, baking and chemical vapor deposition for rapidly cooling the hot plate after heating.

15 Description of Related Art

 In the manufacturing of integrated circuits, a silicon wafer has to go through a series of thermal operations. Besides growing thin films, other processes such as diffusion and photoresist baking also require heating as well. In addition, semiconductor fabrication also involves many thermal treatments including annealing or heat reflow operation. In general, thermal oxidation, annealing, heat reflow, diffusion and material curing operations are conducted in a furnace. However, photoresist baking is usually conducted on a hot plate instead of inside a furnace. Photoresist baking is a low temperature (at about 200°C) heat solidification process. To facilitate

incorporation with other photolithographic processes and to prevent uneven vaporization of solvent inside the photoresist, a soft baking, post exposure baking and hard baking are all conducted using a hot plate.

Figs. 1A and 1B show respectively the top view and the side view of a conventional hot plate. As shown in Figs. 1A and 1B, a conventional hot plate uses natural convection current for cooling. Natural convection cooling is able to achieve a cooling rate of about 0.8°C per minute on average. Therefore, lowering the hot plate by 40°C requires about 50 minutes.

After treating a batch of wafers, the hot plate needs to be cooled by natural convection because temperature of the hot plate is not too high. However, natural convection cooling is relatively slow process and hence the next batch of wafers has to be put aside for the long wait while the hot plate cools down.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, one object of the present invention is to provide a rapid cooling system inside a hot plate so that temperature of the hot plate can be lowered within a relatively short period.

A second object of this invention is to provide a rapid cooling system inside a hot plate so that the hot plate can be cooled rapidly so that overall processing time can be reduced.

A third object of this invention is to provide cooling pipelines inside a hot plate so that the heat can be rapidly channel away by running liquid or air within the pipelines.

To achieve these and other advantages and in accordance with the purpose of the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, the invention provides a cooling system inside a hot plate. A plurality of pipelines is laid inside the hot plate. A sealed close-loop non-crossing pipeline system is used so that flow interference is avoided. Each pipeline has an inlet and an outlet. Cooling fluid enters each pipeline from the inlet. After flowing through an interior section of the hot plate or interior of the entire hot plate, the cooling fluid exhausts from the outlet. The liquid flowing through the interior of the hot plate picks up heat from the hot plate and the hot plate rapidly cools. The cooling fluid can be a liquid or a gas. Cooling gas and liquid include air, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, inert gas, water and various cooling and heating media. In addition, a valve may be added to the inlet for controlling the amount of fluid flowing into the cooling plate and hence the cooling rate of the hot plate.

It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary, and are intended to provide further explanation of the invention as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings are included to provide a further understanding of the invention, and are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification. The drawings illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention. In the drawings,

Figs. 1A and 1B show respectively the top view and the side view of a conventional hot plate;

Figs. 2A and 2B shown respectively the top view and the side view of a hot plate according to a first preferred embodiment of this invention; and

Figs. 3A and 3B shown respectively the top view and the side view of a hot plate according to a second preferred embodiment of this invention.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Reference will now be made in detail to the present preferred embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers are used in the drawings and the description to refer to the same or like parts.

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Figs. 2A and 2B shown respectively the top view and the side view of a hot plate according to a first preferred embodiment of this invention. As shown in Fig. 2A, a plurality of pipelines 210 is laid inside the hot plate 200. A sealed close-loop non-crossing pipeline system is used so that flow interference is avoided. Each pipeline 210 has an inlet 220 and an outlet 230. Cooling fluid enters each pipeline from the inlet 220. After flowing through an interior section of the hot plate 200 or interior of the entire hot plate 200, the cooling fluid exhausts from the outlet 230. The liquid flowing through the interior of the hot plate 200 picks up heat from the hot plate and the hot plate rapidly cools. The cooling fluid can be a liquid or a gas. Cooling gas and liquid include air, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, inert gas, water and various cooling and heating media. In addition, a valve (not shown) may be added to the inlet 220 for controlling the amount of fluid flowing into the hot plate 200 and hence controlling the cooling rate of the hot plate 200.

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The alternating arrangement of the fluid inlets 220 and outlets 230 on the side of the hot plate 200 is shown in Fig. 2B.

Figs. 3A and 3B shown respectively the top view and the side view of a hot plate according to a second preferred embodiment of this invention. As shown in Fig. 3A, a plurality of pipelines 310 is laid inside the hot plate 300. A close-loop pipeline system is used so that flow interference is avoided. The ends of the pipelines 310 are joined together to form a common inlet 320 and a common outlet 330 respectively. Cooling fluid enters the pipeline system via the inlet 320 and branches out to the pipelines 310. After flowing through an interior section of the hot plate 300 or interior of the entire hot plate 300, the cooling fluid merges and exhausts from the outlet 330. The liquid flowing through the interior of the hot plate 300 picks up heat from the hot plate and the hot plate rapidly cools. The cooling fluid can be a liquid or a gas. Cooling gas and liquid include air, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, inert gas, water and various cooling and heating media. In addition, a valve (not shown) may be added to the inlet 320 for controlling the amount of fluid flowing into the hot plate 300 and hence controlling the cooling rate of the hot plate 300.

In the invention, two layout designs for the cooling pipelines inside the hot plate are described. However, these are by no means the only layout of pipelines in the cooling system. Other cooling pipeline layouts using different cooling fluid for increasing the cooling rate is also possible.

It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made to the structure of the present invention without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention. In view of the foregoing, it is intended that the

present invention cover modifications and variations of this invention provided they fall within the scope of the following claims and their equivalents.